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Feature

A glimmer of hope for better education in rural Musoma

ORTON KIISHWEKO, 2nd February 2010 @ 05:18, Total Comments: 1, Hits: 1135

Gundura John cuts the figure of a determined young man as he walks to his Primary school at Mkurira in Musoma rural, some 10km from the town.

According to his account, the 12 year old's life is, without a doubt, at the mercy of the education he ventured into some five years back.

"My parents passed on last year at an interval of two months, so education is the only way I can push on to later help my siblings when they grow up', the ambitious little one says as he rests his small frame on the class chair.

"I have to struggle for other needs as other parental support is no longer forthcoming," he says.



CLASS structures at Mkirira Primary school are symbolic of hope even with an increase in pupils' numbers

In a checkered shirt with kaki shorts, barefoot, half-naked children play in the sand compound near his Mkurira school area.

By all means, Gundura is vulnerable. Young and from a humble background, education, as he confirms by his word, will surely play a significant part in his life. Him being an orphan, the circumstances surrounding his rural life seem poor.

The World Bank defines poverty as a pronounced deprivation of well-being related to lack of material income or consumption, low levels of education and health, vulnerability and exposure to risk.

Poor people are likely to be hungry, usually lack decent shelter, are unable to afford medical care, have no job and there is great likelihood for them to lose children to preventable illnesses.

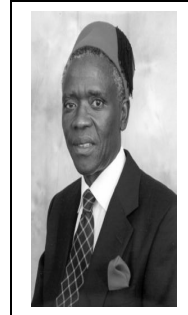
All those scenarios, can however be fought by an investment in education. The district he lives in is Musoma Rural, which is relatively poor and undeveloped.

According to 2002 ministry of education figures, Musoma rural was among the areas with the lowest percentage of secondary schools in the country.

It notes that some 94 per cent of the children in the district obtain a certain level of primary school education, and only 4 per cent receive a secondary school level education. But the future seems bright to many of the education seekers in the area after all.

And children like this ambitious Gundura represent that future. A future that was planned ahead by the founding father of the nation years before 1999 and only implemented by the area legislator.

In the closing chapter of his life, Mwalimu Julius Nyerere, the 'Musoma rural project literature', informs that the father of the Nation, spoke to the current legislator Nimrod Mkono, who is one of the trustees of the "The Mwalimu Nyerere Foundation", about his desire to improve the quality of education in the country, particularly in the area, where the education system was on the verge of collapse.



Hon. Nimrod Mkono (MP)

According to the Musoma rural project write up, the area leader took up the challenge, beginning with the development of a secondary school at Butiama, in Musoma Rural, named after Mwalimu's late brother, Chief Edward Wanzagi.

Mwalimu had personally requested the government to allocate an area for the school prior to his death and it had willingly allocated a piece of land formerly used by the Cubans as an Artificial Insemination Centre, the BAIC.

Upon Mwalimu's death in 1999, the development activities in education were pursued for the well being of the people and subsequently stood for a parliamentary seat in the district.

With that, -young Gundura is just one among Musoma children who expect to get primary and secondary education and perhaps, surpass the constituency's prevailing 0.14 per cent of reaching university level.

According to the population and Housing census of 2002, Musoma rural had 81,039 pupils going for primary school which was at an impressive 94.48 percent. Some 3465 pupils accessed secondary school education, significantly dropping to 4.04 percent which is a drop out rate of over 90 percent.

This was not any better with a mere 118 students going to higher learning institutions. Related research done in the region at the time shows a number of factors conspired culminating into a poor education system resulting from a lack of decent schools and teachers.

But when the area legislator, took the Parliamentary seat in 2000, there were 5 secondary schools in the expansive constituency, a year after Mwalimu had passed on.

This has since soared to 58 secondary schools, some 9 years later, scaling up education prospects for children like Gundura.

As the increasingly benefiting areas in terms of school building materials, the Nyanja and Kyagatta divisions seem to be on the move in education facilities, according to a four day survey by yours truly.

With 28 secondary schools and 160 primary schools, the institutions' infrastructures are characteristic of

education centres having a mix of both arts and science laboratories thanks to support of the community and significantly from the area legislator.

According to the Mkirira village executive, Pashal Maherere at Musoma rural, the level of school attendances has gone up due to an increase in the number of classes at different schools which were initially dilapidated.

While universal primary education has been standing quite strong t in the area for years, the number of schools in rural areas was not enough to satisfy the number of students in the area.

As he attests, he says some schools were also dilapidated in the sense of infrastructure and a general weakness characteristic of many rural education institutions ,of lacking laboratories.

It could be argued that most parents, whose children are benefiting from the scheme, cannot afford to shoulder even a few extra amounts to keep their children in school.

But the availability of such support has enabled children in rural lake side divisions like Nyanja access school decently.

And returning to little Gundura, with a poverty factor, the country's past experience with expansion of primary education in the interests of equity has shown that primary schooling does not necessarily lead to poverty reduction in the long run.

Reality reports will show that near universal primary schooling in the early eighties did not appear to have yielded benefits such as reduced fertility, greater agricultural productivity and overall economic growth in the country's general case.

It was also not sustainable as enrolment ratios fell throughout the 90s. But the current 'Musoma rural' projects wants to address just that.

One reason why the potential benefits of primary education was not realised at the time, was that the quality of education had fallen to critically low levels, according to a report for Centre of Africa studies.

Ironically, the government decision to drop school fees in 2001, threatened to reduce quality further, as thousands of extra children were enrolled into overcrowded, under-staffed schools.

At the time, the report notes, Tanzania had one of the lowest secondary enrolment ratios in the world, and the majority of places at public secondary schools were by children from well –off families, keeping out ambitious children like orphaned and poor Gundura from relatively good education systems.

In a nutshell however, with the area leaders' initiatives, a collaborative effort is being used whereby parental and overall community involvement and participation is encouraged, in building the schools, sensitise parents on education, providing facilities to the schools, and inspiring the students as well.

This whole initiative, under the patronship of the law maker ,it is expected, will, to the benefit of people like little Gundura, significantly scale up the percentage level of pupils going to secondary school; and subsequently joining universities countrywide.